KING CHARLES LAND

Life Among the Tierra Del Fuegoans.

THEIR WRETCHED CONDITION

Some Very Interesting Items Concerning the Southernmost Islands of the Globe.

JESUIT MISSION, Central Tierra del Fuego, December 15, 1891.—[Special correspondence of THE HERALD.]—One morning, not many months ago, while we were living in Santiago, a card was brought to me inscribed "Mons. Jose Fagnano, Superior de la Mission, Patagonia Meridinaly, Tierra del Fuego," which I recognized as that of a well known Italian Jesuit, belonging to the order of Hermanos de Caridad, whose missionary work in this far south land has been more successful than that of any of his predecessors, Protestant or Catholic. Descending to the drawing-room, I found a portly, dark-eyed, middle-aged gentleman, in a black gown, black broadcloth cloak of circular cut, like our old-time "water-proofs," and shining shovel hat tied up on both sides with cord and tassels. The good father could not speak a word of English, and his knowledge of the Spanish language was almost as circumscribed as mine of Italian; yet, in true journalistic fashion, we managed the interview somehow, with the result that I became so interested in the unknown people of this remote archipelago as to promise an early

VISIT TO THE JESUIT MISSION.

And, therefore, here we are, in the very centre of King Charles South land, where the foot of white women never came before. The area of this main island of the Tierra del Fuego group is about 21,360 metres; and like the rest of the archipelago, its western coast is rocky and mountainous, much broken by bays and inlets, while the eastern side is as level as Illinois prairie and as densely wooded as northern Maine. Notwithstanding its prevailing aspect of wild desolation and total unoccupancy since the world began, there are favored sections where the scenery equals the best parts of England—stretches of moorland covered with grass so green that it is almost blue, fertile valleys, snow-topped mountains from 3,000 to 7,000 feet high, fresh water lakes perpetually blackened with wild fowls, rivers wherein nuggets of gold have been found, and a climate resembling that of Canada up in the Hudson's bay region.

The heights are all volcanic, and everywhere scoria and lava appear. The flora of the island includes many strange plants, but only two of the indigenous ones are edible; viz: spoonwort and wild celery. Yet the 2,000 or more native inhabitants never lack for food, though they do not cultivate the soil, and the only domestic animals seen among them are their lean and fox-like dogs, which appear to receive a great deal more consideration than is bestowed upon the women and children.

THE FUEGOANS RESEMBLE SOLOMON'S LILIES,

in just one particular—that they toil not, neither do they spin. They subsist almost exclusively upon the shell fish that abound along the coasts, eaten raw, supplemented by a gobular fungus that breaks out like warts upon the trunks of Antarctic beeches, and by the hard-tack and sea biscuits they are forever begging from vessels passing through the straits. Mons. Fagnaon tells us that before he came here the people had never lived in houses, but constructed the rudest kind of weather breaks of poles and brushwood—always five huts in a group, if huts they could be called, with one fire built in the centre. Cold as the weather is, sleeting and snowing nearly every day in the year, they wore no clothes whatever, except occasionally an uncured otter skin, whose stench would be unendurable to anybody but a Fuegoan. To this day, says the Padre, despite the efforts of all the missionaries, every one of them will sell his or her last rag for a plug of tobacco or a few glass beads, and stalk home happy though entirely naked. There are now about 700 Indians in the mission, who are being taught to read and write in Spanish and to do various kinds of manual labor. The

"BROTHERS OF CHARITY"

have erected comfortable homes for all who will come into the station and abide by the rules, and furnish them clothes, blankets and food until they are able to provide for themselves. But, says Father Fagnaro, it is impossible to prevail upon the most civilized of them, however bitterly the winds may blow and snow may drift, to live in a house which has any sort of door in it. In every case the door must be taken off its hinges and put away out of sight before any Indian will enter the much needed shelter. It is also extremely difficult to persuade the women to take any care of their children, and the nearest approach to sewing which they can be induced to do—always with their own fish-bone needles strung up with fiddle-strings of guanac gut—is to hitch together a few otter skins to partially cover their nakedness.

As may be imagined, life is not particularly pleasant here for these pious, city-bred Hermanos de Caridad, who are gentlemen of culture and refinement—so isolated from their kind in these wild South seas. But

WHOEVER HEARD OF A GOOD CATHOLIC SHIRKING HIS DUTY

for personal comfort? All their food is sent to them for afar, mostly from the brotherhood in Santiago de Chile; and there is not the remotest probability of their being allowed to starve to death for lack of fresh supplies, as did the first Protestants who were sent out here from England through the gross neglect and mismanagement of the mission at home. Mons. Fagnano believes that the women of Fireland are much more intelligent than the men, and though good results are discouragingly slow, he hopes that by beginning early with the children the tribe of King Charles South Land, if not of the whole archipelago, may be christianized in time. This main island is inhabited chiefly by the Onas, who are not canoe Indians, and who, though by no means timid in the ordinary sense of the word, are very shy of showing themselves to strangers who land in their domain, unless for mischievous purposes. Those outside the mission still

LIVE IN A BARBAROUS CONDITION,

having no chiefs nor other form of government, and always actively hostile to the neighboring tribes who each speak a different dialect. The most warlike and dangerous Indians are those of the extreme southern islands, known as Yaghans; while from Cape Forward northward, and up all the western channels to the Gulf of Henas, the natives appear to be of the same families on both sides of the straits of Magellan, or at least to maintain friendly relations with one another. These are the celebrated "Canoe Indians"—about the lowest type of savages on the face of the earth, lower even than the dirt-eating "Diggers" of the Californian peninsula. Though there are thousands of them, and they spend all the hours of daylight on the water—each rude canoe containing a whole family, one or two men with their mother and several wives and as many children as can be crowded in, returning to shore only when darkness falls, where they build a fire upon the rocks and cuddle around it in the most affectionate manner

TO KEEP THEMSELVES FROM FREEZING

—it is surprising how few of them are ever seen by the numerous vessels that pass regularly through the straits. But still more astonishing it is to note how rapidly they will collect from all quarters—perhaps a hundred or more boat loads of them in a few minutes' time, all ready for robbery or murder—whenever a strange vessel comes along, particularly if it be a small one, or in any way disabled. How the rendezvous became known to so many Indians at once when not a wretched canoe was in sight is a mystery; but many shipwrecked mariners have reported the same thing—that signal fires suddenly blazed up all along the coasts for miles and from behind every sheltering rock and out of every tiny creek canoes came shooting swiftly toward the rallying point. Though the Fuegoan is essentially a water man, his canoe is about the rudest affair that can be made to float. Instead of being hollowed out in a good shape from the trunk of a tree, or

MADE OF BARK

like those of the Canadians, these are rough planks, obtained heaven knows how, tied together with fiber and thongs, without the slightest regard for form, a long end sticking up in front like an exaggerated prow. In their motion there is none of the graceful gliding of the North American or New Zealand canoes, for instead of being propelled by paddles these miserable crafts are rowed with oars made by tying a piece of board or thick bark to the end of a pole. On the bottom of each boat, near the centre, some earth is piled, and on it a small fire of sticks is kept burning, for the partial comfort of the naked occupants. On each side of the fire they huddle, six, eight or more in one boat, always giggling, chattering and apparently in the best of spirits in spite of the weather and the constant necessity of taking turns in bailing out the water that flows in between the imperfectly joined planks.

UGLIER LOOKING MORTALS NEVER BREATHED.

They are a rusty iron color, with flat noses, high cheek bones, enormous chins and jaws, crocodile mouths filled with long yellow teeth, no forehead, extremely wide, fat faces, over which coarse hair falls in matted lumps, in figure squatty and round shouldered, having the peculiarly bloated, pot-bellied appearance of charity orphans who have been raised on cabbage soup. Though big-headed and round-bodied their legs are abnormally short, slender and crooked—a physical deformity probably due to spending most of their lives squatting in canoes. The women are more repulsive, if possible, than the men, and seem to care even less about covering their dirty bodies with any sort of raiment, and their uncommonly numerous spawn look like young baboons, only the latter are infinitely handsomer. Their intelligence seems to be confined to a knowledge of boating and fishing, in both of which pursuits they are very skilful. Their fishing lines are made of grass; their hooks of fish bones; their fishing spears have a forked end made from the bone of a sea lion; and

THE WOMEN'S IMPLEMENT

is a stout stick or bone generally notched, saw-tooth fashion, on one edge, for knocking limpets off the rocks. Their weapons are bows and lances, the former having strings made of the entrail of animals and arrows tipped with flint; the lances are long, slender poles with tips of sharpened bone. They have knives, too, the blades of which are sharpened mussle shells, a very large species of which is found along these coasts. A shell four or five inches long has its brittle edge chipped off, and a new edge formed by grinding the shell upon the rocks, after which it will cut not only the hardest wood, but bones of fish and seals, and serves the Fuegoan for every purpose, even to the cutting of a human throat. His method of procuring fire is unique. Wherever he goes he carries along a little bit of "mundie," or iron pyrites, which is found upon the mountainsides all over Tierra del Fuego. This mundie, when struck by a pebble, will produce sparks. The sparks are caught upon a tinder or dried moss or the punt of a dead log; and when ignited the tinder is placed within a ball of dried grass, and this being rapidly whirled in circles soon sets the grass in a blaze. Then it is only necessary to communicate the blaze to a bundle of sticks, and the work is complete. But all this is a good deal of trouble, and that

THE LAZY FUEGOAN DOES NOT LIKE.

Therefore, he is extremely careful of his fire, lighting one on the shore at night fall from that in the boat, and vice versa in the morning.

Among other striking points of difference between these people and the Patagonians is the fact that while the latter will drink as much "fire-water" as they can lay their hands on, and are always more or less drunk when near a settlement, the Firelanders can never be induced to drink wine, beer or spirits of any sort. Though nearly, if not quite naked, both winter and summer, they make some little attempt at personal adornment, the men daubing their faces and bodies with red and black stains, and the women wearing necklaces, bracelets and earrings of shells and fish bones ingeniously joined together.

THOSE POOR WRETCHES.

My first acquaintance with a boat load of these savages came about in this way: While enroute to King Charles South Land in the missionary schooner, we came to anchor one sunset in a narrow inlet, and, as was our daily custom, went out in the captain's boat for a ramble on shore. Returning in the deepening twilight, we found ourselves followed by two canoes filled with Fuegoans, all gesticulating wildly and yelling for "tobac." Knowing that we were in no danger, so near to the larger vessel, we waited until the canoes came alongside and then crowded our boat between them, in order to get a closer view of the occupants by the light of the ship's lanterns. Such incredibly dirty, squallid, vile smelling wretches I hope never to see again. One wrinkled old crone, naked as the moment she was born, excited my commiseration by her violent shivering as she crouched close to the fire, while bailing out the canoe with a bit of broken bottle. I gave her my shawl, and in return she presented me with her sole article of wearing apparel—a few hollow bones strung on a bit of greasy fibre, which hung around her neck. Then I tossed her what I supposed was a Chilian coin, the value of 20 cents; but she did not take kindly to the gift and soon handed it back, making signs that it was no good. Investigation by the lantern's light showed that the despised coin was a golden sovereign, value $5, of course of no use to the Fuegoan grandmother, who would doubtless have called down fervent blessing upon my head if, instead, I had happened to have about me a plug of tobacco.

FANNIE B. WARD.

TWILIGHT MEMORIES IN VENICE.

On one of these purple laden twilights we had floated over to San Giorgio, moored the gondola to a great iron ring in the water soaked steps that might once have held a slave laden galley, and had sat down to watch the darkness slowly settle over the dreaming city. Away off to the right stood the Campanile, its cone shaped top pink and gold, while behind, against the deepening blue, rose its almost twin tower.

The scene awoke all the old memories of the place, and I began talking to Espero, who was stretched out on the marble steps below me, of the olden times when this same harbor was full of ships of every clime, with sails of gold and cargoes of spice, and of the great regattas, and the two decked war barges with slaves double banked rowing beneath; and from this to the wonderful Buccentaur, the Doge's barge, encrusted with gold like the model we had seen at the Arsenal the day before, rowed by members of the Arsenalotti—a sort of guild or corporation formed of the workingmen at the arsenal. How every year occurred the ceremony of the espousal of the Adriatic, and how, when the Bucentaur returned there was a grand banquet, at which the Arsenalotti dined at public expense, with the privileges of carrying off everything on the table, even the linen, vessels and glass.